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Col. WM. DUDLEY'S DEFEAT

OPPOSITE

FORT MEIGS.

MAY 5TH, 1813.

OFFICIAL REPORT FROM

Captain LESLIE COMBS

TO

General GREEN CLAY.

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM DODGE.

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FAYETTE COUNTY, MAY 6th, AT NIGHT.

DEAR SIR:

Herewith I forward you a kind of official account of Col. Dudley's defeat. I have made it more full than I at first intended, in order that, should you not be enabled to get any better, you may make use of *this*. I hardly think you will obtain *a more correct one*, as I have been at some pains to inform myself particularly of those circumstances of which I was ignorant at the time. No officer, I will venture to say, can give a *complete* detail of that affair from his own knowledge. We all had our duties to perform, and even our commander was unable (from the fact of being on foot) to see how everything was managed.

Any other information I can furnish you respecting those officers who fell, etc., will be, if required, with pleasure afforded.

I remain yours with respect, etc.

LESLIE COMBS.

GENERAL GREEN CLAY.

Col. WM. DUDLEY'S DEFEAT

OPPOSITE

FORT MEIGS.

FAYETTE COUNTY, MAY 6, 1815.

DEAR SIR:

With feelings of painful recollection I proceed, in compliance with your request, to detail to you the particulars of a transaction, as *dishonorable* to our late enemy as it was *disastrous* to us.

When Col. Dudley attacked the batteries of the enemy, opposite Fort Meigs, on the 5th of May, 1813, he advanced in three columns. The right, led by himself, carried them without the loss of a man. The middle was the reserve. The left, headed by Major Shelby, formed at right angles on the river, to protect from below. This arrangement was scarcely made before the spies under my command (about thirty in

number, including seven friendly Indians), who flanked at some hundred yards distance in the woods, were attacked by part of the Indian force of the enemy. Unacquainted with the views of Col. Dudley, they knew nought but that it was their duty to fight. For near fifteen minutes, with the loss of several killed and wounded, they maintained an unequal conflict. In this time, Col. Dudley having effected *his* object, and fearing their fate, had advanced to their relief with the right column. The enemy retreated. Our troops, impelled more by *incautious valour* and a desire for military distinguishment than prudence, pursued. He *then* stood firm for a short time on *his right*, and gave way on his left, which threw our line with its back towards the river, so that every step we advanced carried us farther from under the protection of our fort. Whenever we halted, so did the Indians, and renewed their fire—we charged on them. They again retreated. *In this way*, with the loss of from thirty to fifty killed on our side, and a number wounded, was the battle fought for upwards of three hours. How much the enemy suffered during this time, 'twas impossible to ascertain from the circumstance of their bearing off their dead. Soon after the

commencement of the engagement *we* were forced to bring our whole force into action. The enemy was, during this time, receiving large reinforcements from the other side of the river which enabled him *now* nearly to *surround us.* Our troops were generally much exhausted, owing to the swampiness of the ground over which they had fought, and many of them with their guns wet, or without ammunition. In this situation the enemy in much force, fresh to the battle pressed with a most destructive crossfire on *our* left. It gave way. Conscious of his advantage, with a desperate effort he advanced on the remainder. *These,* disheartened and confused, were ordered to retreat to the batteries. Unfortunately, this retreat soon turned to flight, which all the efforts of the officers could neither prevent nor stop.

The best disciplined troops in the world are sometimes panic struck—then can it be surprising that militia, *under these circumstances,* and who had seen scarce *thirty days* service, should become so? In small parties, by tens and by twenties, they arrived at the *batteries,* thereby falling an easy prey to the regular force of the enemy, who, early in the action had retaken *them* from the right column. Thus, upwards

of eight hundred men, who had set out with the most flattering prospects of success, led on by imprudence, were overwhelmed by numbers, cut up, and defeated. About one hundred and seventy only having *made good* their retreat before the close of the battle, escaped across the river in our boats.

Immediately after the surrender, we were marched off towards Fort Maumee, one and a half miles below, near the British encampment. We had gone but a short distance before we met the head of the left line of Indians who had been enclosing us. Having surrendered to Englishmen *entirely*, I expected we should be treated with that tenderness and humanity indicative of a noble mind, and always due the *unfortunate*. What was then my astonishment when, so soon as we met the Indians, they began, *in face of the English guard, of Gen. Proctor, Col. Elliot, and other officers who were riding up the line*, to rob us of our clothing, money, watches, etc. Almost all lost in this way their hats and coats, some even their shirts, and some their pantaloons also. He who did not instantaneously give up his clothes, frequently paid his life for it. No difference was made between well and wounded in this as well as what followed. It would

be almost impossible to relate all the acts of individual outrage that took place. I shall never forget the demoniac look of the villain who stripped me, nor shall I soon forget those who encouraged, since, notwithstanding my request, they did not hinder him from doing it. I showed him my wound. 'Twas vain; before I could unfasten the bandage, regardless of my pain, *he tore* my coat off from my shoulders. I had gone but little farther before I saw ten or twelve men, lying dead, *stripped naked and scalped.* Near them were two lines of Indians formed from the entrance of a triangular ditch in front to the old gate of Fort Maumee, a distance, I think, of forty or fifty feet. The idea immediately struck me that all the prisoners ahead of me had been massacred. I determined, if such was the case, to go no further. Upon inquiring, a soldier told me they were in the fort, and showed me the way which was between those two lines of Indians. During this moment's delay, a man who was walking behind, stepped before me; just as we entered the defile, an Indian put a pistol to his back, and fired—he fell. I ran through without being touched. My feelings were somewhat relieved at finding about two-thirds of the prisoners already

within. How many were killed afterwards I am unable to say. We heard frequent guns at the place during the whole time the remaining prisoners were coming in. Some, although not killed, were wounded severely with war clubs, tomahawks, etc. The number who fell *after the surrender*, was supposed by all to be nearly *equal to the killed in battle.* We now hoped, however, that we were secure from further insult or injury—but no sooner had all the prisoners got in than the whole body of Indians, regardless of the opposition of our little guard, rushed into the fort. There *seemed to be* almost twice our number. Their blood-thirsty souls were not yet satiated with carnage. *One Indian alone* shot *three*, tomahawked a *fourth*, and stripped and scalped them in our presence. It seems to me, even to this day, whenever I think of this circumstance, that I again see the struggles of the dying prisoner and hear him cry, in vain, for mercy. The whole then raised the war-whoop and commenced loading their guns. What were our feelings at this moment, he, who has never realized can not imagine. A description is impossible. Without any means of defence or possibility of escape, death in all the horror of savage cruelty, seemed to stare us in the face.

Rendered desperate *by this idea*, and the perfect disregard which the British evinced for that duty held sacred by all civilized nations (the protection of prisoners), much did we wish for our arms, and had we *then* had them, they would have been surrendered but with our lives. Or, had this been carried much farther, the prisoners would, *at any risk*, have sold their lives as dearly as possible. *Tecumseh*, however, more humane than his ally and employer, generously interfered and prevented farther massacre. Colonel Elliot then rode *slowly in*, spoke to the Indians, waved his sword, and all but a few retired *immediately*. After a short consultation with those who remained, they came and took from among us a number of young men, of whom the British said they wanted to make sons, but *we feared* they took them as hostages for the lives of those Indians who were wounded. Just at dusk, boats came up and carried us to the fleet, eight miles below. Notwithstanding the naked condition of the prisoners, and the disagreeableness of the weather (which was rainy and excessively cold for the season) many of them were obliged to remain all night in the open boats in ankle-deep mud and water. The wounded were put into the holds of the different vessels, where

their only bed (and a good many had not even this) was the wet sand thrown in for ballast, without blankets or any other kind of covering. Provision was issued to them the next day about twelve. Their treatment afterwards was nearly as good, I am induced to believe, as the British could afford, being themselves scant of provisions. I feel myself particularly indebted to some of the officers for their politeness and attention.

Thus, sir, I have endeavored, as briefly as possible, to relate to you a transaction, the particular hardships of which are but little known. To describe the scenes which, altho' time may serve to ameliorate the poignancy of the feelings they gave rise to, can never, while one spark of honor or *fellow feeling* is mine, be entirely effaced from my mind.

I can not conclude this letter without testifying to the bravery and carelessness of danger displayed by the troops throughout the engagement. The only contest seemed to be, while any hope of victory remained, who should first oust the enemy from his hiding places. And I am convinced, when the retreat commenced, by far the greater part had no idea of surrender, but exhausted, confused, and

overcome, were forced to it on their arrival at the batteries.

I remain, with respect, etc.,

Your most ob't,

LESLIE COMBS, *Capt. Spies.*

GEN. GREEN CLAY.

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